

STRATEGY
RESEARCH
PROJECT

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**BRIDGING THE WIDENING GAP
IN
MILITARY REGIONAL EXPERTISE**

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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The dissolution of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War have resulted in a rapidly changing and increasingly ambiguous "new world order" where regional instability has become a threat to U. S. security. DoD emphasis has shifted from a primary focus on conventional military threats to a focus on regional threats impacting all areas of U. S. national power, including political, economic, and environmental threats. U. S. and international peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts in support of worldwide stability are increasingly intended to forestall regional crises that could accelerate into armed conflict. To be most effective, these "non-traditional" missions require in-depth regional knowledge on the part of military planners and commanders. U.S. military expertise in regional affairs is thus becoming increasingly important. However, Service downsizing is affecting our existing community of regional experts. If unchecked, this trend will seriously deplete a unique and longstanding pool of talent at a time when regional security matters are increasingly vital to U. S. national interests.

My paper focuses on the need to retain and expand our pool of regional experts in the U. S military. It discusses several options using present military assets and suggests creation of a Joint regional affairs specialty as the best long-range solution.

Bridging the Widening Gap
in
Military Foreign Expertise

CDR Pamela A. Marshall
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Since the end of the Cold War in 1989, U. S. national interests and Department of Defense (DoD) priorities have changed, based upon the demise of a clearly defined, conventional warfare threat. In the changing new world order of asymmetric threats, regional instability has become one of the United States' most dangerous and unpredictable "enemies." Non-traditional Military-Operations-Other-Than-War (MOOTW) missions are increasing, and military expertise in regional affairs is of great importance to planners and commanders as they work to resolve or remove threats to international stability.

This paper examines the area of military regional experts. As projected Service downsizing begins to deplete these important resources and the continuity they have long provided to the DoD and to the international community, it is essential that other assets be identified to fill the widening gap. The Army's long-standing Foreign Area Officer specialty is discussed, along with options to expand the use of other military assets, particularly Special Forces and the U. S. Navy's newly created Fleet Support community, to fill the military regional affairs "gap" being created by downsizing. An overview of where the author believes regional expertise will be most needed and beneficial in the near

future follows. The paper concludes with a recommendation that pooling limited resources via increased "Jointness" is the best long-term answer to maintaining a solid foundation of U. S. military regional experts as the world moves into the 21st century.

Introduction

The Clinton Administration National Security Strategy, published in February 1995, stresses two major themes: U. S. active, but selective, "engagement" abroad" focusing on the challenges that are most relevant to our own interests and focusing resources where we can make the most difference,¹ and pursuit of national goals through "enlargement" of the community of market democracies.² It emphasizes regional instability as a serious threat to the United States' ability to meet our national goals. It calls for sustaining our security with military forces that are ready to fight, bolstering America's economic revitalization, and promoting free market economies, democratization and human rights abroad.³

To achieve U. S. interests in the new world order, an ability to deal with regional instability and its attendant threats must be incorporated into U. S. overall policy planning and military strategy. This is not an easy task, as Department of Defense (DoD) planners, in particular, are discovering.

Regional instability is multi-faceted. It can be caused or worsened by one or a variety of local or international factors - political, military, economic, domestic, cultural, religious,

environmental. If unchecked, factors exacerbating regional instability may create regional crises with the potential for international intervention. Such involvement could center on humanitarian assistance, MOOTW, or direct military action - not to mention some aspect or combination of the three.

To further complicate military planning, cause and effect relationships fomenting regional crises may be extremely complex, particularly when viewed from the perspective of a different culture. A rapidly changing, volatile, and ambiguous security environment is this nation's current reality. It is why U. S. military experts in regional affairs are essential.

Expertise in foreign regional affairs must now increasingly deal with unstable governments, governments informed by radical religious ideologies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and non-traditional, "asymmetric" threats. To effectively foresee and counter the ambiguous threats in this new environment, DoD planners must possess a thorough understanding of the organizations that generate them - an understanding of the total culture, from ethnic and linguistic factors to religious, political and economic dynamics.

To gain such a high level of sensitivity to foreign regional issues means "growing" experts who live among - not just occasionally visit - other cultures. Such experts must show their host region, nation, or NGO that they can "walk a mile in the others' shoes" - create and maintain genuine rapport and personal credibility, as well as establish a working relationship

characterized by professional respect and trust. U. S. "Foreign experts" must not only be capable of correctly analyzing why an indigenous people take a particular action - but know the culture well enough to predict what actions will be taken in response to a variety of circumstances and stress conditions. All of the above is a very tall order.

In the Cold War era, U. S. regional experts were largely "grown" in foreign assignments worldwide. Embassy civilian and military professionals, through their daily interface with local governments, NGOs, and civilian volunteer organizations, constituted our National Command Authorities' prime foreign affairs information hotline. The DoD, Commanders-In-Chief (CINCs), and individual military services achieved further interface via a wide range of programs designed to increase military-to-military contacts. Now DoD and Department of State budget cuts are forcing the closure or consolidation of U. S. embassies in a variety of countries, particularly in the Third World.

Of the military services, the U. S. Army, primarily through its corps of Foreign Area Officers (FAOs) has achieved extensive regional expertise and earned international respect for its intelligence collection, Civic Action and Security Assistance expertise. Yet, Service downsizing is effecting all communities in the military, including Army FAOs. It thus appears that, at a time when U. S. national planners most need comprehensive and reliable regional assessments on which to base future security

strategy, our long-standing pool of military regional experts is shrinking.

What is "Regional Expertise?"

There is no official military definition of "regional expertise." I see it as a broad category encompassing the traditional areas of Foreign Area, Security Assistance, Military Attaché and Liaison duties. I believe that it logically falls under the umbrella of National Security Affairs - the "study of specific regions of strategic interest to the United States and its allies, building upon the history, culture, and religion of a region." Regional experts should, by this definition, possess knowledge of "current issues, economic and political structures and institutions, military forces and strategic capabilities, policy implications and geopolitical influences."⁴

Another area of increasing U. S. policy concern is destruction of the natural environment. The U. S. National Command Authority (NCA) has recognized that problems of desertification, loss of biodiversity, overpopulation, air pollution, ozone depletion, clean water, and hazardous wastes threaten world health and regional stability. Since the 1980's, the international community has expanded its definition of global security to include natural resource, environmental, and demographic issues.⁵ This too is an important aspect of regional expertise, requiring "experts" who understand the regional cultural, and natural environment.

I see regional experts performing a wide variety of missions

from those associated with real or potential military action to those in support of strictly humanitarian concerns. Examples would include: overt and covert intelligence collection, Foreign Military Sales, Civic Action, construction projects, infrastructure improvement, medical assistance, food distribution, sanitation, democracy training, assisting in military demobilizations and with International Military Education and Training, military advising, "environmental" assistance, and many others - just about any form of officially sanctioned contact with a regional entity on his or her own "home ground."

The U. S. Army FAO: A New Endangered Species?

The Naval Services and the U. S. Air Force have positions, largely as Defense Attaches, that do require some foreign area training. However, none presently have a structured specialty community to develop foreign area experts. I believe The U. S. Army's existing Foreign Area Officer community - with some recommended changes - could form a model for all other DoD agencies as they, of necessity, focus on grooming regional experts.

Army "FAOs" can and do successfully function under a variety of titles. They are Defense Attache Officers, Security Assistance Officers, Liaison Officers, heads of Military Groups, staff officers at various echelons, and, sometimes, simply, Foreign Area Officers. In these individual roles, they can work as part of the U. S. Ambassador's "Country Team," in a national-

level staff position, or directly for a warfighting CINC. In some circumstances, it may be necessary for them to wear several positional "hats" at once.^a

Foreign Area Officer is not an Army accession specialty: Officers are selected for the program at about the fifth year of commissioned service. Those who successfully qualify as Foreign Area specialists often leave the traditional career track to devote most of their time to FAO duties. This is however, not always the case. Under the current system, FAOs can move back and forth between Foreign Area duties and jobs in their accession specialty (or "branch"), producing an officer who is coded as a "FAO" but who may not be a true "expert."

All FAOs, whether highly or minimally specialized in their foreign area, are ranked for promotion within their original branches. Not surprisingly, as the Army continues to downsize, more Field Grade officers (generally in the ranks of O-4 to O-6) are succumbing to reduction-in-force or are being required to retire, many with extensive FAO experience.

In the normal process of downsizing equitably among specialties and branches, the U. S. Army seems about to decimate military ranks of a most valuable pool of Foreign Area specialists. It is my contention that the Army should review its

^a This is often not the best situation, particularly when the combination includes tasks that mix security assistance with military attaché duties. The latter position carries known responsibility for intelligence collection, a task that can make assimilation and acceptance into a foreign culture more difficult.

force structure with an eye toward separating FAOs from the General List Branches and managing these resources under a separate area of Special Branches (like those in the legal and medical specialties). This would ensure a more structured professional career track in Foreign Area/regional affairs, resulting in greater continuity and expertise among the officer corps, as well as providing well-deserved visibility for these endangered resources.

Who Can Best Fill the Foreign Regional Affairs Gap?

"Fillers" for the widening gap in foreign expertise could be found by expanding the existing Special Forces communities of the four armed services, the Ready Reserves, and the U. S. Navy's newly created Fleet Support community.

U. S. Special Operations Forces (SOF)

United States Special Operations Forces encompass Army Rangers and Delta Forces, Navy Seal (Sea, Land, and Air) Teams, Marine SOF, several Air Force Groups operating specially configured aircraft, and the Joint forces assigned to Commander-in-Chief Special Operations Command (CINCSOC). Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations (PSYOP) units often operate together with SOF.⁶

Special Forces from all U. S. military branches receive extensive country and region specific training. In fact, it is often "people skills" combined with technical proficiency that distinguish SOF. Each are essential elements for survival in what are usually very hostile physical or psychological

environments. SOF forces are trained in both "Big-C" and "Little-c" culture. Big-C encompasses what a society has "created and institutionalized," its history art, music, etc. Big-C culture "makes one educated but not necessarily competent." Little-c culture, on the other hand, introduces skills for assisting, negotiating, training, leading, and otherwise "influencing the host nationals." It takes a combination of the two to produce a well-trained Special Operations force.⁷

U. S. Special Operations Forces currently perform some missions that fall into the general category requiring foreign regional expertise, such as Humanitarian Assistance, Foreign Internal Defense, Special Reconnaissance, PSYOP, Civil Affairs, Military Construction, and Counter-Drug Operations.

The military's SOF community in general is being considered for expansion to include a wider array of non-traditional missions. There are benefits to using SOF in this area. SOF operations are tailored to employ minimal manpower and equipment to achieve maximum payoffs in areas critical to protecting U. S. interests.⁸

Conversely, there are also considerable drawbacks to using Special Forces to perform many traditional regional security roles. SOF, by nature of their primary combat missions, are supported by complex training pipelines, high technology equipment, and are far more oriented to warfighting than diplomacy. They come in small numbers and are very expensive. At present, it would be a misuse of both irreplaceable manpower

and scarce resources to keep individuals out of substantive military duties for long periods of time. However, as mentioned before, it is living for long periods with another culture that helps create a true regional expert.⁹

I believe a viable option for the U. S. is to move ahead with expansion of our Special Operations Forces and their existing training pipelines to include more emphasis on performance of non-combat roles and effective interface with non-military personnel. This could increase the number of Special Forces prepared and available for long-term duty in foreign areas.

U. S. Ready Reserves

The Ready Reserves from all services are currently performing a variety of duties in foreign areas, generally during two-week Active Duty For Training (ADT) periods. The Army's Corps of Engineers and the Navy's Seabee Construction Battalions are particularly active. During Fiscal Year 1996, the U. S. Army is sponsoring a ten million dollar pilot program to put Reserve Component forces on active duty in overseas locations for three or more weeks at a time.

While our Reserves forces possess the equipment and the expertise to do foreign area missions, they have much the same drawbacks as using Special Operations Forces. Unless called to extended active duty, Ready Reserves can't stay "on the ground" long enough to learn the culture and develop rapport with their host nationals. Calling even small reserve units to overseas

duty is both expensive for the DoD and for civilian employers who are deprived of their work force.

U. S. Navy

The Naval Services have traditionally supported U. S. regional stability interests and security assistance via their peacetime forward presence operations, power projection and crisis response missions.¹⁰ U. S. warships have been used for decades for operations ranging from port blockades to refugee escort duty, from enforcement of economic sanctions to ensuring the security of international Sea Lines of Communication.

Since the early 1970's, the Navy has been directly involved in efforts to protect the maritime environment. These have primarily focused on enforcement of drift net fishing prohibitions in international and coastal waters, policing of maritime dumping-at-sea practices, and hazardous waste clean-ups on naval installations worldwide.¹¹

Most Navy initiatives related to regional affairs, up to the present, have been done on a part-time basis, using assets drawn from other specialties and missions. However, it is well within the existing infrastructure of the Navy, focusing on resources from the Civil Engineering Corps/Seabees, National Security Affairs Programs, and the new Fleet Support community, to produce a needed cadre of dedicated regional specialists to work both maritime and joint issues. Creation of a formal Regional Affairs community with proven, professional subspecialty coding would be a logical follow-on action. The Naval Postgraduate School

already includes a Masters' degree curriculum in National Security and Intelligence Programs, which is tailored toward foreign area emphasis.¹²

In addition, in 1995, the Navy restructured its Unrestricted Line community to create a "Fleet Support" community within the Restricted Line (similar to the Army's Combat Service Support category). This new structure will provide a highly competitive career path - comparable to that of the warfighting subspecialties within the Navy - for officers in non-warfare subspecialties. As discussed previously, a reorganization of this type, which will better manage and protect non-traditional Service specialties, would make good sense for the Army as well.

At the bottom line, the Naval Services, with their extensive technological and personnel resources, and newly revised competitive infrastructure, could contribute more to the pool of regional experts.

Where "Jointness" Really Makes Sense

The previous paragraphs discussed several possibilities for increasing the inventory of military Foreign Regional Affairs experts. In the face of dwindling DoD budgets for the foreseeable future, combining Service resources in manpower and materiel makes more and more sense, rather than expanding or creating Service-specific foreign area communities. A "Joint" specialty would also create a shared "identity" among military foreign regional experts, similar to what the Army's FAOs enjoy today.

The Defense establishment is being encouraged to use its "unique position" and sophisticated technologies to "augment the capabilities of the civilian scientific community" on global environmental issues.¹³ Could not consolidating the Services' foreign area professionals and initiatives bring synergy to the entire sphere of regional expertise?

Although change is always difficult, the change which the U. S. military must now accept for the good of the United States is an embracement of a new, "Joint military culture" for regional security affairs in which the combined regional expertise of all Services can be combined.^b By each Service identifying billets requiring regional expertise (or that could be better performed by regional experts) and recoding these positions as "Joint," community management could be streamlined and true regional experts placed in areas of the world where informed foreign area assistance is most needed. This would directly support, not only our U. S. National Security Strategy, but our National Military Strategy which identifies regional instability as "a recurring challenge" and discusses foreign regional assistance initiatives as national military goals.¹⁴

"Jointizing" regional expertise would build a much-needed, solid foundation for U.S. foreign security affairs. Working in

^b As political analyst Carl Builder proposes in his 1989 book the Masks of War, the Services must remove the "masks of war" behind which they zealously protect their individual Service traditions and cultures, often confusing institutional interests with overall U. S. national interests to the detriment of the latter.

coordination with other U. S. governmental and non-governmental agencies, and with international agencies and groups, this "Joint" community would form the reliable, comprehensive cadre of regional experts essential to promoting worldwide stability and protecting U. S. national security interests. The long-term economic and professional gains of cost savings, derived from sharing resources and their management and from standardizing career paths, would more than compensate for short-term growing pains.

The DoD is moving steadily toward increased "Jointness" as a cost savings measure to meet the demands of dwindling Service budgets, aging infrastructure, and modernization. Just as importantly, enhancing "Jointness" also focuses post-Cold War U. S. defense on coalition and combined operations. In my opinion, there is now the right national security environment to pool the regional experts from all Services and create the DoD's first "Joint Specialty." It makes good strategic sense. I strongly believe that a dedicated cadre of Joint regional experts can be the United States' early warning alarm and first line of defense in the future. We can't do without them. But, to maximize the effect of the U. S. military's foreign experts, we must consolidate their unique talents under a "Joint" umbrella and centrally manage the assignment process. "Jointness" and centralized career management will better ensure that well-trained people get into the foreign area positions where they are most needed and can be most effective.

Where Regional Security Affairs Expertise Will be Needed Most

In addition to real and potential domestic instability, there are many areas of the world with political, economic, and environmental problems that will likely spill over into the international arena as we approach the 21st century. Our National Security Strategy states that we must "identify and address the root causes of conflicts and disasters [worldwide] before they erupt."¹⁵ This is a monumental task which clearly underlines a continuing need for regional experts to form the link between the National Command Authority (NCA), the U. S. defense establishment, regional governments and non-governmental agencies.

I believe the region with the greatest present and future potential for instability is Sub-Saharan Africa, and I will use this region to illustrate the requirement for regional expertise. We should particularly ensure continuity in military regional expertise for this area.

From the lofty perspective of many policy planners, the U. S. has no "vital" interests in Africa. The 1995 National Security Strategy, while skirting the issue of vital interests does include some rather nice prose, saying that we "need to encourage the creation of cultures of tolerance, flowering of civil society and the protection of human rights and dignity."¹⁶ Finally, the Department of Defense Security Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa lays it on the line - "While we have no direct vital interests in the region, the Administration is committed to

helping empower African states and organizations to resolve conflicts and achieve democratization and economic growth essential to long-term stability."¹⁷ Secretary of Defense William Perry clearly tasks the DoD with "helping Africans find African solutions to their problems."¹⁸

Thus, while our U. S. interests in the region may not be "vital," the U. S. will not ignore this massive, struggling continent, nor do I believe that we should. Sub-Saharan Africa is a huge, unstable melting pot, presenting a considerable likelihood of future unilateral, bilateral, or coalition intervention involving U. S. military forces - or another expensive MOOTW evolution.

With a few notable exceptions,¹⁹ Sub-Saharan nations are still struggling to find African solutions to establish stable political and economic infrastructures. Many of the forty-nine nations in this region are plagued by political turmoil and economic decline, extreme poverty, environmental degradation due to desertification and overgrazing, overpopulation, loss of irreplaceable biodiversity, endemic diseases, and varying degrees of internal strife.²⁰

Most of the above problems are exacerbated by Sub-Saharan Africa's poor economy which has worsened since the mid-1980's. In the aftermath of the Cold War, nations in this impoverished area can no longer trade friendship and defense cooperation for physical assistance, weapons, and large economic aid packages from the West and the USSR.

Another contributing factor to the region's economic woes is an inherent cultural focus on the present - an attitude that "tomorrow will take care of itself." This makes planning for the future an uncomfortable and "foreign" activity for many African decisionmakers. When one combines the region's dwindling monetary resources and the need to properly manage the use of what aid remains, with a cultural bias against looking beyond the present, the chance of making progress seems very slight. Again, this is where U. S. regional experts, who understand not only Sub-Saharan Africa's economic necessities but also its cultural barriers to progress, are vital. Present U. S. assistance, supervised by our regional experts, could include a significant increase in the funding of Military Assistance Programs to Africa which have been cut from \$153.3 million dollars in 1984 to a scant \$5.1 million in 1995 - a small increase from a low of \$3.9 million in 1994.²¹

While the U. S., from a humanitarian stance, is interested in the health and welfare of Sub-Saharan Africa, our main concern in establishing and maintaining effective relations with governments and organizations in the region is to promote U. S. national interests. A cadre of U. S. military regional experts working in the Sub-Saharan area is essential to provide non-military assistance, as possible, but is most valuable as a link to keep the NCA fully informed of events, indications, and warnings that may effect U. S. security interests.

It is impractical to expect that the U. S. military in the

future will possess the manpower or funding to place a regional expert in each of the forty-nine nations in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, regional area expertise will be vital in advising the NCA on which nations or sub-regions are most volatile and where U. S. presence will have the greatest stabilizing effect.

The survival and eventual stability of Sub-Saharan Africa will likely remain an international concern well into the next century. It seems to me that the sooner the international community can make progress in helping Sub-Saharan Africa to help itself, the less it will cost us in the future, economically, diplomatically, and militarily. However, until significant progress is made to increase regional stability in Sub-Saharan Africa, the region will remain a potential threat to international security and U. S. interests. Military foreign area professionals - who understand African needs and expectations from a variety of perspectives, including the military perspective - will be this country's best guides in formulating useful and effective policies to assist Africa as it looks for its own solutions.

Conclusion

Over the next twenty years, it is likely that the United States will be repeatedly involved, not only in the crises of Sub-Saharan Africa, but in other remote or exotic parts of the world. It is one of the jobs that comes with being the world's strongest and richest nation. How then can the U. S. and the international community ensure that we get our best non-military

"bang for the buck" in any region? How can we understand and deter the regional "thug" who has a vested interest in maintaining disorder and instability?²² How can we identify those cases where peace operations or military force are truly necessary to promote U. S. national interests and support those of our allies?

U. S. planners, policy and decision-makers must remain actively involved and critically aware of what is going on in the fast-growing "global village" and must create a viable military career path for the development of regional experts. As the world becomes more chaotic, our democratic nation and way of life may depend - sooner than we think - on how well our government and military can "read" others nations' intentions. That means taking advantage of all possible areas for refining and sharing foreign area information, and always keeping experts on the ground.

The U. S., the DoD, and our international allies can make a large investment in worldwide future foreign area security and stability if we tear ourselves once and finally away from the "good old, predictable days of the Cold War." We must concentrate and maximize defense assets in the regional affairs arena for the biggest return on investment. We must retain and nurture those existing Foreign Area experts we are fortunate enough to count among our active duty strength, be they military or civilian. It means creating new or expanding existing pipelines to educate and train more of these invaluable assets.

It means changing our thinking to place value on specialties that, although lacking a traditional "warfighting" flavor, are those that are most needed in this new world order. It also means consolidating existing Service regional experts wherever they are found - Special Forces, Ready Reserve, and elsewhere - and expanding these communities at a "Joint" level.

At the bottom line is Change . . . "Big-C" Change. The Navy is fond of advising its sailors to "use every tool in the toolbox." Well - the U. S. defense toolbox is in drastic need of new tools. The DoD and the individual Services must revise military selection and promotion criteria to place far more value on now-highly-valuable, non-traditional warfighters. We must actively encourage development of expertise in previously non-traditional areas (our new "tools."). Our leadership must not lose sight that this is a time when a very few individuals - Foreign Area experts who know the "lay of the land" and the "minds of the people" - can make a very large contribution to national strategy and security.

I believe that competent regional experts will help our decisionmakers to speak more clearly when formulating and projecting U. S. national policy toward specific areas of the world. That we choose to fund and maintain regional experts "on the ground" also demonstrates U. S. commitment to active engagement in the international community.

The years since 1989 have been hard for America and for the U. S. military. Despite years of effort, we still have far more

questions than answers. Moving our DoD behemoth into a new and "revolutionary" defense era, plagued with uncertainty and budget constraints, appears an impossible task. Our hope in making a successful transition for the U. S. military and the nation lies in strategic leaders committed to well-managed change - leaders who will recognize, value, and make the best possible use of our DoD tools - the traditional and the non-traditional.

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